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THE MAYANS

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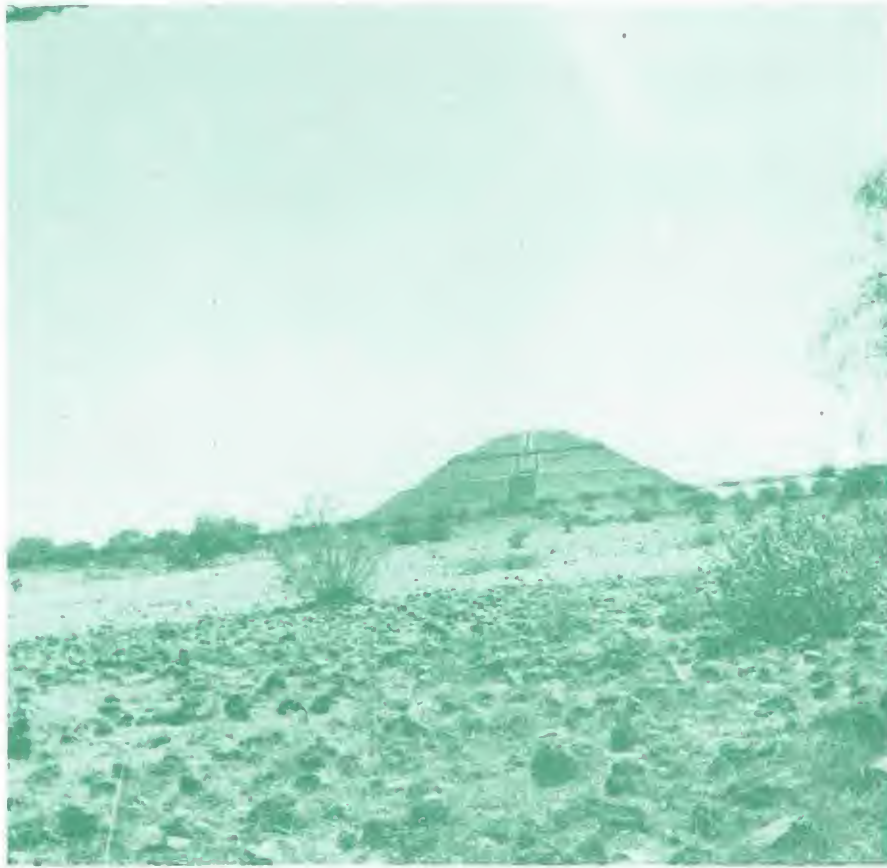
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The Great Parable Series

THE GARDEN OF THE HEART

THE SOWER

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THORNY GROUND

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BELLOVED CENTURION:

With this lesson we take one step further in the series we have called THE GREAT PARABLE SERIES. In it, we will reflect on truths with which most of us, as Mayans, are familiar, but many times we lose sight of as we go along the thorny pathway of life.

And so it is wise and good that we compare the sowing of a seed to the sowing of the deeds in our lives which build character. We compare the seed which is sowed in the earth to the influence which the seeds we sow may have on others around us. We cannot live for ourselves. A thousand different things connect us with our fellowman and we must always keep in mind that everything we do counts for something, if it is good, even though it may be very small.

All Mayans have learned that when men do anything for God, no matter how small it is, they never know where it will end or what it will do for them. Therefore, the secret of happiness is to be always doing things for God and, remember, the little things are just as important as the big ones. I have heard people say, "There is nothing I could do that would be very important for other people." If you have had such a thought, make up your mind never to permit it to permeate your being again; because, remember, just a word or a smile from a good person sometimes will carry more weight than some very extravagant gift from some other direction.

We never know how far our influence might go; it could extend from generation to generation. I like the thought of Thomas A. Kempis, when he says, "Influence never dies; every act, emotion, look, and word makes influence tell for good or evil, happiness or woe, through the long future of eternity" - and I remember so well the words of a young minister who said, "I could enter a place of sin or iniquity and never be tempted by it, and, therefore, not degraded, but its effect upon some boy or girl who looked up to me as an example, seeing me in such a place, could be an influence for evil all their lives."

This series of lessons explains to you how great is your own individual influence on the lives of those around you; and, as you sow your seed, certainly so shall ye reap. We do know that the life of a faithful Christian man is definitely a guide to a Paradise of living, and we want Mayans everywhere to learn to live in that Paradise. We learn how and where to sow the seed as we, in all seriousness and consecration, enter the Parable, The Garden of the Heart:

THE GARDEN OF THE HEART. Matthew 13;3-8.

THE SOWER

THREE of the four gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke - report how Jesus told a story about a sower of seed, a farmer or a gardener, and what happened to his planting, and why. John would probably have told it too, but he was more interested in the mystic side of the Master's life, and wrote from his own spiritually wise mystic point of view.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus is using a figure naturally familiar to the people of an essentially agricultural country. He always chose settings and imagery familiar to his hearers, and never more so than in this case.

He is talking, of course, about the good seed of the word of life and the different kinds of heart soil in which it finds itself, and what happens to its chances for growth because of the soil. But the parable gives off all kinds of implications, and this lesson will deal with one of them, namely the fact that the influences our lives give off are really words of life too, such as that life may be, and these influences also have to be planted in favorable soil or they will either be stunted or perish.

From that point of view, then, we make our approach. The first thing to realize is that you and all of us are planters of personal influence. In the parable it is called a word, but an influence is really a word and vice versa. Actions, for instance, are influences, and it has been said that they speak louder than words. We may sum it all up by saying that life in its every phase is a planting, and that there will be a harvest according to the seed and the growing conditions provided for it, including the kind of soil into which it is cast.

You are reaping the harvest of some of your earlier planting even now. This day and its conditions and effects have grown from what you have planted in days past. This is true not only in your own life but in the lives of others where you have planted influences. In the lives of your loved ones, your friends, and perhaps even strangers, you can see the effects of the influences you have exerted there. Sometimes these are as surprising as they are plainly seen.

Do you like what you see, or not? Is it good, or bad, or a mingling of the two? Are you seeing the maturing of the harvest you wanted then, or that you want now, or both, - or neither? If you are happy with the result, you are to be congratulated. If not, you deserve sympathy for it is a disappointing and sometimes a sad experience. But remember that we are planting all the time and reaping all the time, and perhaps later harvestings will be more gratifying. In any case, you can begin now to select better soil, knowing that soon or late you will gather results from that also.

That is the law of karma, or judgment, or whatever you prefer to call it. It is simply the principle that whatsoever one sows he will also reap, that what one gives he will get, that what one measures it will be measured back to him, that in life's mirror it is only ourselves that we see. Every day is judgment day for each of us, and each of us has the power when he sows to determine what the day of reckoning will bring when he reaps.

BAD SEED AND GOOD

THE parable of the sower pays attention mostly to the matter of the soil, and has nothing to say about the seed beyond the mention of it. That is because the master is taking only one kind of seed into account - the word of life, the message of the kingdom. The assumption is, of course, that all the seed is good seed. There is no question about the nature and outcome of that.

With our plantings of influence it is different. Influences are of many kinds and degrees of worth and worthlessness. Even the good seed we try to plant, the influences we send out with the best of intentions, is more or less subject to the kind of ground on which it falls. Even it can be lost or give a poor yield, unless we are very careful where it falls and what kind of care its growth receives. For the reason we have stated the parable says nothing about bad seed. The Great Sower would never plant it, nor would he ever make a mistake about what it would bring forth. But bad seed is something we have to look out for, so a few words of warning might be said.

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Much of the wrong influence in the world goes out from people who simply do not know any better. Like those who crucified Jesus, they know not what they do. If they did know, they would not do it. Jesus did not condemn them. He only pitied them, remembering that they had been tricked into their costly mistakes, for their reaping was just as inevitable as though they had known and done better.

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Still, there is little excuse for our being unaware. We could learn wisdom instead of folly if we would. The work would be no harder and the tuition would be less. Being unaware is simply the result of drifting along and becoming whatever circumstances and associations happen to make us while we do no thinking for ourselves. All we have to do to attain such a condition is - nothing. No effort to escape wrong influences and to expose ourselves to the right ones - that is all it takes.

We should at the beginning learn the difference between the good seed and the bad, and develop the will to choose and plant the good. That is why it is important to choose the right kind of companions, go to the right kind of places, enjoy the right kind of pleasure, and cultivate the right kind of desires and habits. It can make the difference between a golden harvest and a blighted one. What are these right things we have spoken about? Only quibblers argue about them. Everyone knows what is right and wrong, or can find out.

But we have also to face the solemn fact that even after choosing the right kind of influences to plant in the world life we have to be careful of the choice of soil. We have also to remember that even in good soil poor growing conditions can defeat our good purposes and cause us to reap either a poor set of consequences or none at all. Now let us look at some of the things Jesus said can happen to what we plant, even though it may be good and planted with the best of intentions. Our study now turns to what may happen to seed after it is sown.

OUT OF BOUNDS

THERE are many ways in which planted seed can be lost or fail to take root. Jesus does not undertake to enumerate them all, but he does mention a few of the most common examples. The first is that some seeds fall by the wayside and get devoured by the birds. In other words, some of

the influences we send out fall out of bounds.

Consider the meaning of the word sin. It is not just something that has been arbitrarily catalogued as wrong, something that is bad just because someone says it is. It is far more definite than that. SIN IS SOMETHING THAT MISSES THE MARK. IT IS LIVING BESIDE THE POINT. IT IS FUTILITY THAT SERVES NO PURPOSE.

Why is that wrong? It is wrong because its makers are living superfluous lives. It defeats the purpose of our very existence. It reduces the meaning of one's life to zero, so that whether or not he had been born makes no difference to destiny. It is making one's life a blank page in the story of life. It is living out of bounds.

Do not misunderstand. Your life is not meaningless just because you sometimes feel that it is. We all feel that way at times, even when we have done well, and including many people whose lives are really very rich and useful.

If your life really is not counting for much, that is occasion for concern, but not for despair. Remember that you can change it on a moment's notice from the negative or neutral to the positive and constructive. All it takes is a simple act of will and the determination to carry it through. Just begin now to make your life count for something worthwhile. It is as simple as that.

Do not be tripped up either by the assumption that all this necessarily refers to something spectacular and outstanding. Only a few can rule, or lead, or ride at the head of the procession. The plain people, however humble and nameless, who do what they can where they are, make their lives count for something worthwhile too, FAR MORE SO THAN SOME WHO ARE SEEN AND ACCLAIMED BY THOSE WHO SEE ONLY THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE.

Do your duty in terms of the needs at hand and the deeds that are within your power. Do not compare either your opportunities or efforts to meet them with those of anyone else. It is your life and not someone else's that you have to live and realize on as best you can.

The point here is not to let your efforts go afield. Do not cast your seed out of bounds for the birds to eat. Scatter your influences where they can take root, and grow, and multiply. You have powers and capabilities which in some ways are doubtless superior. Do not lose or waste them. We reap no harvests from the wayside, BUT ONLY FROM THE FIELD.

Look at the jack of all trades who is master of none. Look at the scatter-brain who never concentrates his thoughts and aims on anything. Look at the laggard who is so busy planning great things that he never accomplishes any of them. These people are living out of bounds. Do not be like them. Concentrate your purposes. Conserve your gains. Then reap your harvests.



STONY PLACES

IN the master's list the next sower who plants in vain is the one who lets his seed fall in stony places where there is hardly any soil. There seeds do a surprising thing - they come up. But they cannot meet the requirements of growth for lack of ground to take root in, so the sun withers them, or the wind beats them down.

The error here is a double one. The sower either should not have acquired rocky ground or else he should have removed the stones. Not having done that, he should at least not waste seed there, but keep to the better soil with his planting.

The meaning is, be careful what kind of soil you plant your influence in. There is good ground everywhere, even in unpromising looking places; but rocks are not good for growing purposes anywhere. Only weeds will grow among stones.

There is no way of knowing why some people seem to prefer the stony places, but they do. This reference is not of place or location. It is to the unpromising areas of experience and endeavor, to the things and situations that never produce anything worthwhile and only lead to waste and loss.

Some turn to crime and devote to it talent and effort that would have won them outstanding success in some legitimate field. Some turn to unproductive frivolity and spend priceless powers on what is simply of no importance one way or another. Some turn to nothing because they make no effort to find anything better to do.

"One must do something" is often the cry of those who spend their precious years and expend their God-given abilities trying to grow things from stony soil. Of course one must do something, so why not something worth doing? Why not get off the stony places and plant where the soil is good? What is attractive about the valueless, the unproductive, the degrading?

Jesus was brought up in a place where little that was good would grow, and where the people took a hostile attitude toward him and his good works, but he did not stay there. He moved out into the areas where at least some of the people were receptive to the influences he sought to plant. He chose his soil.

The scorching sun and the prostrating winds symbolize the destructive conditions that so surely come to test the vitality of what we do. They will not fail, so we must see that our efforts are deep and firmly rooted. That calls for quality living and endeavor, with no inferior materials or workmanship.

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One may be poor and unknown, but anyone can give the world a demonstration of high grade living. Anyone can do some important thing, and do it so well that it will be challenging and lasting. The world may be slow to see the importance of what you do, but nothing can destroy it, nor can anything keep it from ultimately fulfilling its purpose.

THORNY GROUND

A THIRD fate that can befall some of the seeds of influence our living plants in the field of human experience is to fall among thorns.

We never see useful plants of any kind growing in thorn patches. The competition is too keen. Weeds are hardier than useful plants, but thorns are even hardier than weeds. Where thorns grow only thorns grow. The only way to redeem the ground is to remove the thorns, and thorns are not easy to remove.

The thorns here represent the preoccupations of life, such as the choking effect of the cares of the world and the misuse of riches. Just try to produce something worthwhile in the same field with the valueless, the superficial, and the deceiving, and you will soon see what happens. Futility will grow anywhere, but value will grow only where conditions are good and where it is well cultivated. Let the deceptive get started, and you will find the true beginning to disappear.

Have you grown flowers? Was it easy? Did you not have to go to considerable pains preparing, planting, tending, and protecting them? But you did not have to plant the thorns and weeds that grew there. They came up volunteer. Nor did you have to cultivate them. They will flourish anywhere and under any condition. Anyone who works with the soil discovers that.

You can grow a fine crop of thorns or weeds without labor. Any effort involved would be required in trying not to. But flowers and grain take work. If you want thorns you don't have to do anything about it. If you want beauty and good you must plant them and help them grow.

Your instructor once saw green vegetation growing in abundance from the weather cracks in concrete riff-raffing along a river bank. Were they plants of value? Certainly not. They were common weeds. Anything desirable would never have grown there, and no wise sower would ever have tried to make it do so.

Not long ago plants were found growing from cracks in a large rock. Desirable plants? Never. They were weeds, those preoccupations of the land that will grow anywhere without effort and also without value.

You can see that here in the parable of the sower Jesus was laying down a very important principle. This is the personal message it has for you - look out for the preoccupations, the unimportant things that will take up all your time and energy if you let them, so hardy and fast-multiplying that they can keep you from doing anything really constructive with your life. You can have the inconsequential things if that is what you think you want, but you will become so engrossed with getting them that you will never have much else.

Remove your preoccupations discriminately, however. Do not tear them out one and all. Just remove those that are choking out the worthwhile things. Make the living of a full, rich, useful, satisfying life your preoccupation, and give it THE RIGHT OF WAY. Let that be the first claim on your time and energy. Make it your major interest. You will always be glad you did.



GOOD GROUND

WHEN the Master reaches the fourth classification of soil he breaks into a happier vein. The picture is now that of seed sown in good ground, with a good yield. Some sowers will make that wise choice, and the rest can if they will. The result will be a liberal increase in the quality of their influences. Their effectiveness will be thirty, sixty, and even a hundred fold.

Those who meet this good fortune with the influences they send out into the world are the ones who are most successful in planting them where they will grow best. Since what the sower does for others is the measure of his own gain, this is his profit. As Abraham Lincoln said, plant a rose wherever you think a rose will grow.

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Planting is an investment in seed and soil. If both are good the returns are good. This brings you, the sower, face to face with two important decisions, choices that are to determine the effectiveness of your life and work, so make them wisely and implement them well.

The first is the choice of seed. In the parable Jesus is talking about the word of truth he planted in human lives, but remember that here we are broadening the term to cover any and all good influences, for all good is a form of truth.

That in general is the test to apply to the forces you release from your life to go out into the world and affect its progress and happiness. Ask of each, is it positively and constructively true? It is if it is good, beautiful, helpful, and effective. If you are a prophet you can send out prophecy spoken, but if not, you can send out prophecy lived. What can be finer than that?

The second decision you have to make is the choice of soil for your planting. That means the kind of lives in which you will invest your interest, encouragement, and wisdom. You may find the receptive anywhere, but it is of no use to waste it on the unreceptive. Jesus himself said not to cast pearls before swine. At times, however, it is surprising who are receptive and who are not. As a rule they are not the rich, strong, and fortunate, for they feel adequate already. It is more likely to be the poor and humble, for they know their need.

The way it works out in practice is that though you may not deliberately choose ground that is out of bounds, or stony, or thorny, some seeds will fall there. All you can do is to try to choose good ground, but some results may surprise you either way.

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Suppose that on a typical day you release all the good you can in all the cases that look promising. Some you thought would be receptive are not, and vice versa. But if you keep on planting where you think there is promise of growth your percentage of success will be high, and your percentage of failure small. Even some who do not seem to react now may see the point later and produce fruit.

The wise sower does not patronize nor lecture his seeds or his ground. He does not tell them he is going to help them grow and do better. He just releases the conditions for healthy development and gently encourages seed and soil to play their parts in the miracle of growth. There seems to be no better way.

THE GREAT SOWER

In closing this lesson let us think of the master's own methods of planting his influences in human life, for he was the great sower even as he was the great teacher. He is our example in all things, so of course he is our example in this. How did he go about it? He followed the line of confidence.

To begin with, he had complete confidence in his methods. In the use of them he never wavered for a moment. He never allowed doubt to undermine the effectiveness of his contacts. He released truth and good as a sower plants his seed and left it to come up and grow, "first the grain, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

Next, he had complete confidence in his seed. He went about doing good and there was no question in his mind as to what the good was. It was the rescue, nurture, improvement, and enrichment of human lives. He never changed that program or experimented with any other.

Next, he had perfect confidence in his soil. That is, he believed completely in the possibilities of people, of human character. He put confidence in some rather discouraging looking cases - people who looked very much out of bounds or like stony or thorny ground; but if they were, the influences he released brought them into place, or dug out the thorns, or removed the stones.

Having this perfect sureness, he planted his seeds, quietly cultivated them, and waited for results, and saw the results appear. Fishermen and tax gatherers were made world figures. Sick bodies were made whole. Contaminated hearts were cleansed. Untaught minds were quickened and illuminated. Conditions in lives and about them were set right.

He was never mistaken in his assumption that everyone has good possibilities. He even did enough for Judas to give him a belated conscience. THE SECRET OF THIS WAS THAT "HE KNEW WHAT WAS IN MAN". KNOWING THAT, HE DID NOT LOOK AT WHAT ANY PERSON WAS, BUT ONLY AT WHAT HE WAS CAPABLE OF BECOMING. That is the first great secret in cultivating kingdom values.

That is why he had confidence in the group of people through whom he proposed to change the world. Only one failed him, which is a very small percentage of loss. He chose none of these people for what they were, but for what they were capable of becoming. As one crop furnishes the seed for more, his influence was and still is passed from one generation to another in ever widening circles.

Here then are your plan, your field, your materials, and your pattern. You can begin where you are, and work according to your situation. Then your life will never be unproductive and you will never face a stalemate. You will find yourself empowered and led from the day you become a sower and go forth to sow.

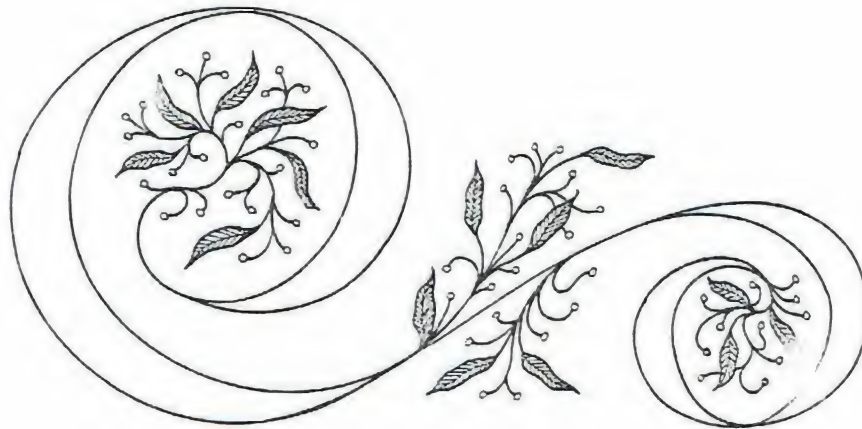


Let us keep these words of Channing in mind every day in every act we do; in fact, it would be wise to commit it to memory: "Others are affected by what I am and say and do, and these others also have these spheres of influence, so that a single act of mine may spread in widening circles through a nation of humanity." That is a great thought, isn't it, Beloved Centurion? Let us abide in it and repeat together the following prayer:

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, give me good seed to plant in needy lives, and help me to find those who need it most and will derive from it the greatest blessing. Thus help me to serve in building thy world kingdom of right, happiness, and peace. Amen.

Your Class Instructor.



The third lesson in this series will be entitled FOUR PARABLE AND THE KINGDOM, Matt. 13, and in it we take up the following subjects:

Gems on a Common Theme

The Hidden Treasure, Matt. 13:44

The Kingdom of Heaven

The Pearl, Matt. 13:45-46

The Mustard Seed, Matt. 13: 31-32

You Are the Central Figure

The Leaven, Matt. 13:33

Prayer

